# THOMPSON
## AN
# AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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# THOMPSON

AN

# AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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# THOMPSON

## An Autobiography

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# INTRODUCTION

THE task which has fallen to my lot is no easy one. These memoirs form no very connected story—rather are they for the most part essays, the reflections of a mind above the ordinary, stored with experiences only to be met with where an exceptionally gallant character is concerned. Thompson's life, until his later years, was essentially one of action—age, a tendency to stoutness, and the consequent inability to continue to the full the pursuits of youth and middle life, could not quench his spirit, yet more and more, as time took its measure of him, he turned for relaxa-

tion to recollection and meditation. A Bayard turned philosopher.

Those who knew Thompson will find excuse for editorial shortcomings in the difficulty of my adventure.

THE EDITOR.

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# CHAPTER I

## EARLY LIFE

I KNEW my father.

Keen-eyed and straight of leg, a handsome fellow—given somewhat to roving abroad, it is true, and causing my mother in consequence some anxieties at times—he was devoted to hunting and sport of all kinds; and he was a good father to me so long as I lived with him and my mother. Later we met from time to time, and if my youthful admiration suffered diminution, I have to confess that I owe something at least to him.

My mother was a gentle soul, petite and delicate of feature, preferring the

quiet joys of home life: yet they were not ill assorted. I combine in myself the better characteristics of each. I picture the home now: the stable-yard, the drive, broad lawns and cedar trees, the park and house, in which most of the sitting-rooms, certainly chairs and couches, were forbidden me, a thing which annoyed me at the time, though I see now that it was good discipline; and there is no denying that, with my taste for the horse-boxes and my fondness for digging about in the garden, I was often in no very suitable condition for polite society.

There were four of us; three died rather suddenly in early life. My mother was distressed, but soon found comfort in centring all her devotion upon me. Had I let her she might

have spoiled me, for just about that time my father was often very busy with some friends and neighbours on hunting excursions, and would be away for nights at a time, after which, and a sound thrashing, he would be very tired and sleep for hours on end, paying little attention to her or to me. I remember well his coming back one morning dragging a paw which was torn and bleeding. He promised to take me with him next season, and you may imagine I looked forward to it, but it was not to be, and before I was very old I was given a master. He wore, I remember, knickerbockers and a blue shirt, and I soon took to him. He was then called Little Master, and shared my tastes to the full.

For a time—I never realised then

that it would end—we stayed in the country, and it was for both of us a period of complete enjoyment. There were the woods to walk in—bunnies to chase (for I was not yet old enough to hunt), and good food and drink, so that, even for a youngster, my figure gave promise of the strength of muscle and quickness of limb for which I was later so famous: then, on a day I remember well because my father at last caught the old grey rat that lived under the floor of the corn store, I was whisked off with Little Master, to his great discontent, to London.

Do you know London? Do you know any London dogs? If so, I need say no more; they are ignorant and for the most part conceited, and I had, before they were many days older, to

administer severe punishment to several for remarks — pleasantries typical of them—upon my country ways. What did they know of hunting? What had their fathers taught them of sport? The best they knew was a cat chase down the street and to earth in an area coal-hole. Now, to my mind, cats are good enough for keeping one in exercise, but if you catch one you are sure to get into trouble, and I remember well finding three dogs in the square, who had killed a cat, at their wits' end how to hide their guilt, till I dragged it for them to a house where a Pekinese lived and dropped it down the area. I remember the gardens too, and the hundreds of ridiculous dogs all shouting different things at one time. I had to tweak

one, with a blue ribbon round his throat, sharply in the neck for asking 'if I thought this weather good for the pigs and cows.'

Then worse still befell, for Little Master left me and went to school. There were letters and messages, of course, but I grew very short-tempered and was bored, and I got thin, too, and had horrid dreams of chasing cats, which squeezed, just in time, through railings where I could not follow. You see, I had had eight months of active, healthy, outdoor life, and I never was quite like other dogs. I suppose if you live in towns you must deteriorate. Moreover I made, as you may imagine, no friends—how could I ?—and I was beginning to lose heart when I was told that Little

Master had been ill at school and had gone to a big house by a big river to recover, and that I could join him. I lost no time, and we took train and were with him the same evening.

## CHAPTER II

### I FIND MYSELF

I FOUND that Little Master would not, as I had hoped, be with me all the time, for I had expected to take him about freely with me, and that instead, and until he was stronger, I should be cared for by Arthur, the coachman. Well, in him I found the best of friends —indeed we both did. He would take me along the river bank and let me chase water-rats, and he would take Little Master out on the old white polo pony, then only used to fetch the letters. He said I was a 'promising pup,' and, although at the time I remember that I rather resented this,

I soon learned that he was right and meant it kindly. He took me thoroughly in hand.

I was given a kennel by the coach-house. Now just the other side of the drive were eight kennels, with neat iron railings, occupied by dogs of all sorts; there were Irish terriers, fox terriers, greyhounds, spaniels, and retrievers. Their kennels looked across to mine, and they lost no time in letting me know that they needed no intruders, and that if I intended to stay they should know the reason. One ugly terrier, lean and thin-chested, with none of the bull that I have in me, stood up at his railing and shouted over to me to know what I had done with my 'blue leather collar with the pink bow,' whilst one of the grey-

hounds wanted to know where I had left Mary-Ann and the perambulator.

I was furious and bit at the railings. I wanted to get at them — I was so angry that growls dried in my throat, and, moreover, I never was one for talk when there was cause for action; but just then Arthur came by and winked at me, so I passed a remark or two and went and lay down. Later, when Little Master came for me to take him for his walk, they were furious; but I said nothing, and when I came back after tea I brought my Albert biscuit with me, and sat and ate it on the drive in front of their kennels.

After about a week Arthur said, 'I think, old boy, you could hold your own with one of them,' and, to my delight, he loosed one of the terriers

and opened the door of my kennel. The terrier was wild with delight—he was to fight me, a mere pup, and all the gallery looking on. For my part I realised that on this fight my future depended, so, with some dignity and very quietly, I walked out, nodded to the others, and sat down. This seemed to put my antagonist out a bit, for it is not a recognised opening, and he began waltzing round and barking, but, still sitting, I shifted round and round so as to keep him always under my eye. At last this drove him almost mad, for the others began to laugh, and ask him to let them be called when the fight was to begin. Then he rushed at me. I dodged, but he got his teeth into my ear. I was soon loose again, and for some five minutes we fought, now rest-

ing for breath, now closing again. He had blood on him ; my ear was painful, and my near hind leg almost useless when we went at one another for the last time. As we closed I learned the lesson of my lifetime — my leg failed me, and he towered above ; I could not rise, but, seizing his hind leg, I gave it a twist which threw him on his back. In an instant I had pinned him to the ground. 'That will do for to-day,' Arthur said, and I confess I was not sorry. He sponged me down, and I lay and slept a solid twelve hours on the clean straw. When I got up and took notice, I found the atmosphere changed. The others chaffed me about my ear, but that was all. A week or so later, meeting the Irish terrier and another in the road, I

challenged and fought both of them, laying one out with a bitten tendon, and finishing off the other as one shakes a rat.

After that I had more freedom, and Little Master would sometimes take one of the other dogs with us. Once he took me with him to follow the guns, and, although such as I could not fail to appreciate the retriever's ability, shooting, from my point of view, is poor sport. The harriers were better fun, and we were sometimes with them ; but they all hunt together, and there is little chance for individual initiative. I remember once, just where the valley narrows by the warren, a hound gave tongue, and dashed off followed by two or three others. I saw the line to go, and cut across the strip of down. It

was a sure thing, when a whip galloped up, cursing and shouting 'ware riot,' and put an end to our hunt. Jealousy, I suppose, because he wanted to hunt another line; that's what I mean, hunting in a pack leaves little chance of initiative, or so it seems to me.

I was growing fast in these days, and filling out; although a fox terrier, there is an enviable strain of bull in me, which I must have inherited from my mother's side. She had short legs and a broad chest. I was very strong. Nothing tired me; I could follow the pony for five miles, and then go hunting rabbits for hours at a time on the steep hillsides overlooking the river, or chasing rats along the riverside, though these water-rats have a mean way of getting off by

swimming rapidly across the stream. I, for my part, never took to water, though I could, of course, swim, having been thrown in once or twice to give me confidence.

## CHAPTER III

### A CHANGE OF SCENE

SOME years passed, the time being spent partly in the country, partly in London, and the latter seemed the longer. I had grown up now—a life of active exercise had broadened my chest and strengthened my jaws; my face, if not strictly handsome and somewhat scarred, was one which indicated remarkable intelligence. Indeed, physically and mentally I feared no rivals—appetite and sleep never failed me. If I had a fault, it was that I was at times rather tender-hearted — often, for the sake of others, I have refrained from killing an obviously undesirable cat,

which did not belong to our household and had come in to steal what it could; often I have broken off a fight—that is, a fight not begun in anger—in order not to humiliate some wretched mongrel before his master or mistress. However, the time in London was irksome, and no doubt my people noticed it, for one fine day we all moved to the country for good. I lived in the house now, for I was perfectly trained to all the sometimes ridiculous conventionalities of domestic life.

Well—it was a cottage with an ample garden. There were shrubs under which I could bury bones, and there were moles to dig for in the borders, and beyond there was a stream, and beyond that a wood, leading to a perfect piece of rabbit ground. I

remember going there very soon after our arrival; it was evening, and I made my way quietly to within twenty yards or so of some rabbits just the other side of the hedge; I could watch them through a narrow track between the leaves and grass. There I waited till they had their backs turned, and then I dashed forward—— Something held me back, it had me by the neck; I gasped for breath, and struggled to get free—the thing only tightened the more: then I saw that it was a wire noose tied to a peg. In time I got the peg out of the ground, and took it home hanging from my neck. Some people have a poor spirit for sport, or else a mistaken sense of fun.

Little Master was here for holidays, and a great time we had. I used to

take him long rides on his bicycle. He would take biscuits in his pocket, and off and away through the pine woods out on to the heather hills; then, if he was tired, he would lie down and sleep whilst I watched over the bicycle and himself—or sometimes he would lie with me for a pillow till I could have whined with cramp.

Much of my time, too, was spent in keeping Little Missus—his sister—amused. I used to pull her doll's perambulator by string traces, or be put to sit in the pram, which was then set to run down hill. Once I jumped out; I thought it would amuse her, but I fell on my nose and rather hurt myself, loosening two front teeth. I will say she made up for it, for she, too, was devoted to me; only the biscuit would

have been nicer if the teeth had not been loose.

Also I had my duty to do as watch-dog—you see, the house was in my care—I had to know all the tradesmen, and if a new one came our round he had to be initiated as to my duties. Also there were the fowls and ducks to look after—there is a good deal of quiet fun to be had with the ducks especially—and with foxes about I felt my responsibilities and played up to them.

I remember one day Little Master and his father took out their bicycles, and I was all ready to start with them, when they said 'No, it is too far for him.'

Too far for me!

So I was put in the smoking-room, and they started. I gave them two

minutes, and then, jumping from the window, ran up the garden and out by a hole that I had made under the wire, just for such emergencies as this, and was in time to see them at the end of the road—just in time indeed, for one can't trust to scent when people ride bicycles. I followed on keeping them in view for about four miles, then I knew they would not take me back, and I caught them up and, with a shake of my ears, passed them. Well, we went about ten miles, past the trout stream and up a long hill, to visit a pack of Basset hounds. I never saw such deformities in my life: they were friendly, though, and told me that they were short-legged so that men could keep up with them; that they had remarkably good noses, and they could

keep going for hours and never lose their line, all of which is no doubt true. I asked if they were related to some short-legged crocodile dogs I had seen in London, but this annoyed them as I thought it would, though I did not know why until one of them explained that the dogs I meant were 'German truffle hunters' and not sporting dogs at all, and only owed their distinctive shape to their domestic virtues.

I picked up a nice bone, which was just out of their reach, and carried it part of the way home, but had to drop it at last, for ten miles had to be covered and it was no use to bury it. Well, I got in 100 yards ahead of Little Master—twenty miles with bicycles—I only tell you about it to show what I could do in those days.

What a life it was. There were rats to catch, too, and, though I think ratting on the whole poor sport, because they go to ground and you get so little of a run, it is the best of good business for they need killing, and a quick dog, as I was, prepared for any twist and turn, can occupy his time ratting to good advantage.

You may guess that I soon made friends, and many a night's hunt I had, but, whilst you need two to hunt rabbits, you must not think that any two make good hunting. However, there was a lady dog living not far off who used to slip off with me, and no better sportsman or more perfect companion ever lived. She used to risk a good deal for my sake, and often received a thrashing for being away;

'lost' they used stupidly to say. She had a perfect nose, great speed, and no end of endurance, so that, with my skill thrown in, we rarely had a blank night's hunting, and used to return after dawn, tired out, eyes streaming, often covered with mud or dust, to seek refuge and sleep in the outdoor kennel until the kitchen door opened and let me in, whilst she went off to face the music at her home.

She was much admired by all the dogs in the neighbourhood, and became the mother of my son.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON FIGHTING

I AM not quarrelsome by nature—in fact I have often been described as the gentlest of creatures, as indeed I am. I know my duty, and I have been a most faithful guardian of my master and his people. I guard the house at night and the grounds by day. Among the tradesmen who call I have my friends, and there are those who don't like me so much; but, be assured, I am no mean judge of men, and if I don't like a man he soon sees that it is because I know there is something I don't trust about him or his past. Some may say this is fancy—far from it; we

dogs can tell, and there is little that is hidden from us.

So, too, of course, in regard to other dogs.

For my part, I take no notice of dogs smaller than myself, I don't care of what breed; and so far as concerns fancy dogs I despise them. Some have blamed me for lack of sympathy, but if a dog is worth anything I soon know it. I never misuse my strength, and, beyond making it clear that I despise the little brute, I usually pass him by in the street without a look, or, if at home, just curl up and go to sleep.

Once I had a very unfair trick played upon me. An old gentleman called, and, when he got into the garden, put his hand in his pocket and took out, as I thought, and so would you have, a rat,

which he put down on the path; of course I snapped it up and shook it. Oh, there was a to-do!—it turned out to be some sort of dog from Burma or Siam or somewhere. In time, I am glad to say, it recovered.

Now fighting is a science—you must have strength, quickness of eye and limb, and, of course, courage; but without science, which is the outcome of experience and much study and thought, no dog can be a fighter of the first rank. I have known brave dogs—many of them—beaten in a couple of rounds for want of science. They think when a fight is over the thing is done with—not so I. For days I used, rolled up in my basket, or lying of a summer day on one of the flower-beds when no one was about, to fight the fight over

again, and think how to improve my methods. The experience of my first fight was the making of me, however—you remember I told you about it. Well, at the first crouch I would feint to rise, then, as my opponent came at me and rose to engage at the neck, down would go my head, and as he passed over me I would seize his hind leg—twist it and throw him—then disengage, and in a flash at his neck and pin him to the ground. All my biggest fights were won in this way. People began to call it 'Thompson's throw.' Curiously enough no other dog that I met ever adopted these tactics—they did not think the thing out and make it their business to learn why I always beat them.

Of course many friendly scraps are

reckoned as fights by men and particularly by women, but if you are going to fight you know it directly the other dog comes within scent or sight, and up goes the hair on the back of your neck.

For some reason or other I was not universally popular among dogs, and my fights were so constant that I began as a general rule to be taken on a chain into the village—that I did resent, for there were left free to me only those dogs that called at the house and flung insults at me under the stable-yard gate, and then made off before I could be after them. In particular there was a brown nondescript sort of half poodle, half retriever, a most ill-kept and horrid fellow, with nothing to catch hold of if one did meet him in the road—often I have gone for him as he ran, and got no

hold but a mouthful of curly brown hair—ugh!

One dog came about two miles once to provoke me to a fight. He got it: somehow or other he had found his way into our garden—they buried him near the manure pit.

Some of my fights were strictly duty fights, for Master was in my care and so was 'Missus,' and it was clearly necessary to have it known what man or dog had to reckon with in regard to them—and you see, we dogs have the double advantage of knowing what other dogs say as well as what mankind says. Many is the time I have had to punish a dog for some passing remark upon Master, of which he himself was perfectly unconscious.

For years, however, if not popular, I

was respected and feared in our neighbourhood, and it was not until after my illness that I lost my first fight. It is hard to recognise the advent of old age; it is harder to have to acknowledge loss of full strength before any faculties are diminished, yet I had lived twelve years of real life undefeated, and had established a reputation for scientific application of strength and character to the achievement of victory which made my Master once say to me:—

'You should have got a D.S.O. for that scrap, old boy.'

People said life could not be dull if one lived in the same house with Thompson.

Once I was paralysed for some weeks after a fight, because I was bitten above the tail—so the Vet. said. I was

carried home and they thought I was dying, but after some brandy and milk, and a good rubbing with turpentine, I took a turn for the better.

I think the best fight I ever had was with a large Irish terrier—we had long disliked one another, but had never until that day found ourselves both loose in the road at the same time. I remember it had been a very wet day and the road was rather slippery with mud. Well, I was just outside our place, sniffing about generally and somewhat aimlessly, when I scented him.

I threw up my head for joy and trotted forward to the corner, and there he was, waiting, for he too had got knowledge that I was out and about. I don't think he was altogether pleased, because he had been paying a call in

the neighbourhood, and had a fine big bone in his mouth and no time to bury it. I said I would give him time to hide it if he liked, but he was just one of the type to which chivalry is unknown—no fault of his, of course, such feelings are born in one and cannot be cultivated. I only knew one perfect case of chivalry, and that was of a very well-bred retriever, a fine sportsman, though, as it happened, no very keen fighter; still he had the right spirit, and I admired him. One day another dog picked his bird; they had a few words about it, yet he actually allowed the thief to carry the dead bird to its master before he went for him, and then, poor fellow, he got thrashed by the under-keeper for fighting. He told me about it afterwards, and was rather sore on the subject, but

I assured him it was just what I should have done myself.

Well, this Irishman crouched and so did I, and after manœuvring for position he came at me—down went my head and I got him by the leg; still, I did not succeed in throwing him (I thought it out afterwards and came to the conclusion I had badly judged his length of limb), and round he came on me and got my hind leg, not badly however, and hurling all my weight against his side I threw him. Then we walked off and provoked one another.

The next round was uneventful, except that the cook and the gardener came out and tried to interfere, which is always troublesome, for people have a way of seizing upon the dog which is doing best, which they unjustly condemn,

instead of the one which is down. However, they did not actively interfere, being satisfied to scream and shout 'Thompson' at the top of their voices —still, we had to make a show that the fight was 'off' till they had turned their backs.

Then commenced the last bout. I threw him this time and got at his neck, but he had a very wide collar and it was that which nearly did for me—it almost covered his whole neck; well, by a mischance I got my teeth firmly, as I thought, into it. Very luckily it had those stupid brass studs all over it and a plate as large as a signboard with his address, and my teeth got against one or other of these and so were not buried in the leather. I think he was not so inordinately proud of his collar after-

wards; all his friends say he used to swank no end about it until that day.

My teeth were, however, in the collar too long, and he shook me almost off my legs; it was only the bit of bull I have in me, the broad chest, that saved me, and I kept my feet and soon got my teeth full in the small of his back. Round he came, and for a moment we were apart. There was blood streaming down his side, but it did not seem to hurt him. I had a very painful foot, and a scratch over the eye was bleeding freely and preventing me from seeing very clearly. Cook evidently thought I was done; well, I own I felt fairly extended, but I remembered that if one does feel 'done' it is nothing to what the other fellow feels, and so I went at him again. This time I had him above

the shoulder, and was throwing all my weight against him when an old tin saucepan hurled from ten yards range got him fairly behind.

I walked home, limping it is true, and covered with mud, but carrying my head high.

Have you ever been washed down, given bread and milk, and then put in your basket with a blanket over you, your tired limbs throbbing you off to sleep, and a serene sense of victory all over you? I know nothing so pleasant.

Next day I was stiff and missed a piece of my ear, but I got out and found the bone all right.

# CHAPTER V

## MIDDLE YEARS

In spite of a home in which I was worshipped, well fed and comfortable; in spite of the fact that I was respected or feared by all the neighbourhood, there was now just one little pinch of pepper in my soup; though my muscle remained, and my sight, smell and hearing were excellent, I could not combat a tendency to stoutness—not that this troubled me much except that rabbits seemed to fear me less, and cats had the insolence to wait for me to come up to them. I ate well, of course, but did not get much real exercise, for I was a good deal alone. Also my

people took most ridiculous precautions against my fighting and so keeping fit. Master was away for many months at a time in Germany, where he was learning the native tongue and finding out the road by which, no doubt, to lead his squadron some day to the Rhine. I was a little anxious, too, because those wretched crocodile dogs are all over Germany, so I was told, and I feared he might bring one home. I did not know how Mr. Walter Long, M.P., had even then seen the danger of Germans in our midst, and made most stringent regulations about bringing foreign dogs into the country. I need not have feared, however—they were never the sort of dogs for my Master.

Still I had to recognise that times

had changed, and, though I took him for walks in the woods, and sat on his knee and slept in his room when he was at home, the longer excursions together were over, for he used no more to ride out on a bicycle, but had got himself a motor cycle, throwing a scent which had no charms for me, and moreover, in regard to speed and distance there are limits even to my physical powers. I never left him when I could help it, however, and well I remember once, when he had a fall and knocked himself out and was brought home unconscious, how I whined at the door till I was let in and allowed to sit on his bed and lick him—nothing did him so much good. Then there was the day when he put his shoulder out, from a fall in a race; and that other time

when he came home two hours late for dinner with his chin cut in pieces and his shirt covered with blood. Yes, I did a lot of nursing then—I don't know what he would have done without me—still, it was a less active time for me, and, as I have said, I began to put on flesh. They took to calling me 'old fattums' and the like. Still, what my own people called me did not matter, and as for the rest they were full of respect for me—at least the neighbours were. Up till now, strangers, friends of my people who came to the house, used to look at me and sometimes edge away; now they seemed to have less respect for me and even chaffed me—one fellow asked what my name was. 'Thompson,' he was told. 'How ridiculous! Why Thompson?' he asked. I just

looked at him. I hope he read my thoughts.

I rarely went to the village now on foot, but I did enjoy driving in Missus' pony cart with her, and looking over the splashboard at all the dogs in the road. How they envied me! I used to look over their heads and appear not to notice them.

One day we were trotting along and an old enemy of mine shouted out something about 'too fat to fight.' I just jumped over the door into the road—almost without thinking—and came a dreadful crash on my face, losing two front teeth. That was before the London General Omnibus Company had put up posters telling one how to get off a vehicle in motion and look in two directions at once.

Another thing which troubled me was my son—he had no manners and constantly offended me—he lacked all sense of respect, and I think his mother, although undoubtedly very beautiful and a real sportswoman, cannot have been so well born as she had led me to believe.

I had had great hopes of him—I trained him very carefully—for days I used to teach him how to fight and how to hunt, and how to perfect himself in all that a high-class dog should know, but there was a heedless self-satisfied manner about him which got worse as he grew up. He was not bad looking, not so broad as I, but a well-built dog and very quick on his legs.

His name was Ripton.

'What a funny name,' some one said,

once. 'Oh, we call him that, of course, because he is the son of old Thompson,' was the explanation. I never quite saw the point myself.

Anyhow, he was wild and self-willed and cunning. We constantly had growls, and worse, together, and at last one day, when I was out with Father and a friend of his, and he and I were tied to a lead to keep us out of the way of some golfers, he, quite rudely, told me not to bump against him. I, of course, replied rather sharply, when, without another remark, he seized me by the jaw—well, he pulled and pulled, but, though I got him down, the lead got wound round us and we fought, rolled, and struggled in no end of a tangle until Father broke his cane over *my* back and at last separated us. My

cheek was torn open from my eye to my lips. Well, Father carried me home a mile or more, washed the wound with some stinging stuff and telephoned for the veterinary surgeon, who, after an hour or two, arrived.

'Oh, so it 's old Thompson in trouble again,' he said.

'Again,' I thank you; however, I swallowed my pride, and stood on the table whilst he sewed up the wound; I could not smother a groan or two, but that was all that escaped me. In a few days I was well, but I have to confess that had we not been separated it might not have been a fight drawn in my favour. That settled Ripton, however, and he was sent off to live in that same stable-yard where my own early days were spent.

It was just about then—no, a little earlier if I remember rightly—that I had my bad illness—it happened like this. I was strolling up the path by the wood which passes where the market gardener used to keep his fowls—well, I had met a good many smells and investigated several fresh rabbit scrapes when there, just under a bush, hardly off the path, was a lovely piece of butcher's meat. I never stopped to ask myself why it was there, but took a bite at it—then I suspected some trick, and left it and strolled on. Not far, however; what a pain! I felt all doubled up, my knees seemed to give way and I had a singing noise in my ears—one thing I realised, and that was that I must hurry home. I was out of breath and exhausted—I could no longer see clearly, my body

was swelling horribly—a sort of cloud was over my eyes, when at last, I hardly know how, I stumbled up to the kitchen door. They saw I was ill, and put me on a rug on the sofa—then I knew no more. It seems they were at their wits' end. Mother was expected home; would I last out? At last, it seems, she came and of course she knew what to do—she ran upstairs to the medicine cupboard, tore down again, and stuffed eleven blue pills (all she had) down my throat—then she watched over me all night. Well, she saved my life; but I never was quite the same again—physically, I mean, for that bit of poisoned meat practically ended my active career. I only fully accepted the fact six months later, when she had taken me up to the village and left me

outside a shop, and I had a fight with a dog I used always to beat at the first round. He got me down in a puddle of water and I fainted. Mother picked me up and took me to the chemist, who poured a glass full of sal-volatile down my throat.

'It 's his heart,' he said.

## CHAPTER VI

### ON SPORT—REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTS

You cannot acquire the sporting instinct —it is either there or it is not. Of all my acquaintances, not one in ten had the real instinct for sport. Many love to hunt for the sake of the meal to follow; that was not my case. I hunted for the love of it, and when I wanted to go hunting, nothing—that is to say almost nothing—could stop me. Often I hunted quite alone, but it is best to go hunting with one other, provided he knows the game.

If you have made up your mind, and planned with your friend to go out on

a certain evening, you must prepare the way for it carefully. In particular make much of your mistress; master may be neglected, men are not so observant, and, moreover, if you make a special show of attention to women they think you mean it completely, that it is all because they deserve it, and that you cannot help it and consequently are completely under their sway. Be sure to be present at lunch, and pretend to want to go for a walk—that is, if you are sure they are staying at home that afternoon; eat a good tea, and then, whilst not obtrusive, keep well in evidence until they go to dress for dinner—then is your chance. Walk up the garden looking as if you had lost something, and get into the shelter of the kitchen garden; then, when the

second gong has gone about five minutes, out with you by the hole under the wire in the hedge, which by the way should always be kept available and in working order, and down the path into the copse. If you have fixed up the affair with a friend, let the *rendezvous* be out of earshot of the house, for conscience is a curse, and I have on several occasions turned back at the last moment on hearing my name shouted in, well, somewhat insistent tones. Sometimes, too, it has happened to be Father calling and cracking a hunting crop in case I should mistake his meaning.

Well, assume that you do get away with a companion who knows the game, go quietly, no yapping—by a sign send him to the corner of the bank on the

hill, and yourself edge along below till you are between the warren and the open ground. Then advance together at a distance very quietly.

There they are, feeding with their backs to you—fifty yards, thirty yards, then up goes an ear—mark him, cut him off—that's right, to you again—hunt silently, you fool, you've told the whole warren that we are here—now stick to him, don't turn to an easier one, keep on the same rabbit—drive him to the bracken, that's right, run him down, the stream is in front and he won't face that, double quickly and keep him worried—ah! I thought I had him—only a mouthful of fur, still it was a near thing—at all costs head him off home—that's right, he's blown, good hunting!—both of us into him at once.

Well, that is all we shall do this evening, and I feel very replete and sleepy. Go home? No, indeed, the nights are short and warm, and the grass very soft under the hazels; we will sleep there, and then move on two fields away, and start again when the dawn comes.

Early morning hunting is never so good, however, for the rabbits are no longer hungry and don't take chances; still if you have sport, well and good, but be sure to get home by the time the doors are first opened—watch for that and get in quietly, go to sleep in your basket if you can get to it, but be sure to appear hungry (which you are not) at breakfast, and if any one says you have been out all night, make a grievance of it, as if you had been shut

out and had only refrained from barking so as not to wake people.

Once I had a great hunt after a hare, but after a mile or two scent got poor and I felt that my time was being wasted, though I have often started hares for the fun of seeing them go.

Sometimes I have run with the beagles, but not often. I had rather a bad time once which put me off beagling.

It happened in this way. I was walking quietly along enjoying the day when I heard them; fine music it was, and I thrilled with it. Well, I listened a moment and knew the hare must avoid the river and turn to the right between me and the farm, so I made full speed towards the copse beyond. They were coming along full cry when I sighted

the hare, then I too gave tongue and got right in front of puss, who doubled and turned aside through the yard where the pigs are. The pack came up but was silent now, and had spread out trying to pick up the scent again. Just then a fellow galloped up on a horse, cracking his whip and shouting out, 'Whose d—d terrier is that, heading off our hare and spoiling sport?' I was just wondering what he had to do out beagling on horseback, when—well, I seemed to sting all over. It was some days before I could lie down really comfortably.

Ratting is good fun in winter—it is not sport. You wait above a rat-hole, and, if you are quick, you may get a ferret, if you are slow the ferret may get you; in any case there are usually

more ferrets than rats, and it's 'ware ferret' here and 'ware ferret' there till you almost forget about the rats. Of course, there are few more pleasing things than to get a big rat by the back and shake the life out of him, but there is no after-pleasure in ratting.

Rat-catching by oneself is no occupation for a dog; it means sitting and watching interminably, and I leave it to the cats.

Some dogs are very jealous hunters—always claiming points for themselves. For my part I never count how often I have turned a rabbit, nor do I care to whom the kill falls, for to me the sport is the thing. If another dog and I are making full speed for a gap in a hedge, I never thrust; let him get ahead if he will, the courtesy of the chase has been

mine. Likewise I never interfere in a fight. I know nothing so ridiculous as to see half a dozen dogs all fighting at once—two is a fight, three is none.

Digging out rabbits is rather fun; you rarely catch one, but there is always the chance that you may. I have known a small terrier go so far down a rabbit-hole that he lost his way and backed about no end of a time before he got out, for you see you can't turn round and can only guess the way you are going backwards. I always liked to tear away the sides of the entrance with my teeth, and then I could get a good start in the soft earth, but one rarely can get far enough and it has its dangers—sometimes the burrow gets filled up with the earth one scratches out and throws behind one.

I heard of a dachshound once who got about six feet down, and then a root of a tree stuck in his collar—there he was, half smothered in earth and quite helpless. Luckily he was not alone, and his companion was very intelligent and went home to get help.

With a great deal of trouble, barking and tugging at his trousers, she persuaded the gardener, a dull-witted fellow, to follow her, and after some hours they were able to dig him out—he had been underground and nearly smothered for about twelve hours; still, he was not much the worse—only very thirsty.

Moles afford digging practice during the summer months, and I had good fun once with a hedgehog; I nearly got him by the nose, but he rolled himself up so that I could not bite him. However,

instead of going off as he expected I would, I rolled him down the garden path, past the rockery and right up to the house. Master was greatly amused. My nose was a little tender afterwards. As a matter of fact, hedgehogs give no sport and are rather good things to have in the garden, so I usually leave them alone.

## CHAPTER VII

### LATER YEARS

I SELDOM hunt now. It is strange, but after not much of a walk I am just as glad to go home. In the summer I like to sleep under the rhododendron bushes by the tennis lawn, in winter in my basket by the fire, or I often sit for hours and watch the fire burning. My son has gone away, and I have little to worry about.

I am very happy, although if I do go out and meet a few friends I rarely go alone.

Sometimes the old longing for the chase gets hold of me and I go off, but not for long; I feel I am slow and

heavy, and, though my scent is good, I don't see quite so well as I did. People about here have a great regard for me. 'How is old Thompson?' is always their first word. My people call me 'The Ancient.'

Master not long ago gave up his motor cycle and got a nice chestnut hunter—he frequently used to ride over to see me and the rest of us. I often wish he had had a horse when I was younger; we could have had a great time together.

I told you about his going to Germany—well, now he is in the army. He told me all about the war breaking out, and that he hoped to be off soon—at first he used to come home from time to time and then his visits ceased. Father and Mother were very serious

and spoke in anxious voices, and if it had not been for Missus and her pony I should have been bored to death. She and I used to go for long drives together.

Sometimes, too, I was taken out in a car; that is interesting, but you go too fast; the smells all get mixed up as you whisk past, so that you can't disentangle cat from rabbit, or stoat, rat or dog from one another. What I enjoy now is the pony cart. There I can sit up on the side seat and recognise everything. Yes, I am happy and contented for the most part, though sometimes they say I have become querulous. I find people always say that if they are themselves short tempered.

I used often to think of Master at the war—I wondered if he remembered

all I had taught him about fighting. Indeed he was not often out of my thoughts, and as I sat before the fire I would picture him fighting Germans, taking them by the throat and shaking the breath out of them, or rushing along and then down on his stomach, and then up and on again. I have seen soldiers practising that; it is a clever trick, for the enemy can't tell how fast you are coming, and just when you start up and run towards him again he is thinking you are going to lie there a little longer.

Then there are the rifles, like the gun Father shoots pheasants with, which go off all the time, and the big guns that fire and make a great noise so as to frighten the enemy and distract his attention. Oh, I could picture it all. Then I would see Master stalking a

Boche just as I taught him to stalk rabbits, warily, always edging him away from his underground shelter, and then with a shout leaping at him and killing him with his sword.

One day we heard he had been wounded—it was he who told us so on the telephone; some few days later, when he and we were all sitting round the fire, the Secretary of State for War very kindly sent us a telegram confirming the fact. He was at home for some months then, and I felt quite young again—we were always together, and I thought he would perhaps stay at home for good now—only it seemed the King could not spare him (I don't wonder, had not I taught him all about fighting, both by example and precept?)—and wanted him to go out again.

He was away a long time then. We often heard from him, however, and I concluded that, as he had time to write postcards, he could not always be fighting. Well, Father and I were sitting one fine day having tea, when a car drove up and the bell rang—I knew who it was if nobody else did; then we both heard his voice. I rushed to the door as it opened and he almost tripped over me. He had just come over for a few hours, it seemed, to go to Buckingham Palace, because the King wanted to see him.

On the breast of his tunic he wore a coloured ribbon.

No. I was not surprised. Was not it I who had brought him up?

# CHAPTER VIII

## ON MANKIND AND OTHER SUBJECTS

'Oh, it's instinct, you know.' How often have I heard that said! Instinct is treated as something inferior, given to dogs to make up for man's great, and, as he fondly thinks, highly developed power of mind.

Well, what is it?

It is what man has no longer got, and it is what woman still has a little of; in her it is called 'intuition.'

Well, but what is this instinct?

I will tell you. It is that sense which we have trained ourselves to keep and improve, and which mankind has lost almost completely.

You 've heard that in a wild, sparsely inhabited savage country news travels faster than men can run, just as it does among dogs.

'Impossible,' says man. 'Yes, there exists a something,' says woman, 'a something indefinable, a something that surrounds, envelops; a something intangible, mysterious, yet permeating everything; a kind of—oh, how can I describe it?—another sense.'

Others call it 'A psychic condition.' Well, this is what it is, it is the sense of smell.

How do I know that a strange hired car, out in the road, has brought Master? I do though. If I have lagged behind and missed Master on a walk, how do I find my way home? 'Instinct!—no, smell.' Man says, 'I

can find my way back because I remember the red cottage, and from there I can see the tall fir tree and the stile.' I say, 'I can't miss the way in the dark, because I can tell a hundred yards off where the track is down which I noticed, as I came, that a stoat had passed in the early morning, and once there I shall be within range of the chicken run we passed, from which one can scent one's way along the path that leads to the village—and then I shall be able to pick up where the clergyman lives who drove over to see us last New Year's Day, because I noted his smell at the time.

But there is more in it even than that. Why do I know whether I shall like or dislike, at sight, the dog or the man coming, though I have not yet

caught sight of him, round the corner? —how is it I am attracted to one man and not to another?—why do I trust one and not another? Sense of smell. That is where we have the advantage over mankind.

There is a lot of nonsense talked, too, about our being 'dumb animals.'

'How the dear dog seems almost to talk.'

'How intelligent he is, he seems quite to understand.'

'Oh, dear Thompson, if only you could speak!'

Well, think what we should lose if we could talk. If we can't talk, we can make ourselves understood if we have any intelligence at all—I never failed—whereas not only can we talk freely by voice and scent among ourselves, but

also understand everything that mankind says; that is to say, all that is worth understanding. No, if we talked as well, we should lose half our freedom —and think of our consciences! How often have I been told not to eat up the cat's breakfast? Had I answered, 'All right, I quite understand,' where should I have been? As it is, Mother just says, 'Of course the dear dog could not understand.'

I have often wondered at, and sometimes pitied, Man's limitations. He misses so much. I have seen Father stand for no end of a time idly watching the clouds and the distant woods from the hill behind our house—just stand there looking, whilst the whole place was full of fascinating scents crossing and re-crossing one another and getting

mixed up and then sorted out again with every breath of wind—some of them strange ones coming from quite a long way off, too.

Of course unintelligent dogs, and dogs which are poorly bred and lack character and initiative, are liable to become the slaves of man. Naturally that sort does not interest me, but a dog with any self-respect, self-confidence and tact, can twist master or mistress to his will. I never found any difficulty in doing so.

I never was a show dog. I don't admire show dogs much, but I must say that breeding tells—see the hold that a well-bred dog has over a crowd in the street. Of course cross-bred lurchers have, in my knowledge, risen to distinction, but it is usually through

some quality of cunning. I remember a brindled lurcher I knew well—people used to say, 'What a poor wretched-looking dog.' Yet I never knew that dog go hungry. Once I remember there was a bone lying in the road: he knew if he took it the others—for there were several dogs about—would all go for him and rob him of it, so, winking at me to keep quiet, he just called the attention of the others to it. Up they all came, growling and calling one another names, and scrambling for a hold of it. He sat on the path, as meekly as possible for some seconds, and then suddenly jumped up and barked out 'Motor car, coming.'

Oh! he never went hungry, that dog.

[For want of a better place, I insert here some of Thompson's aphorisms. Ed.]

An Aristocracy of intelligence will supplant an Aristocracy of breeding only if the latter ever realises the danger.

A cunning mongrel may rise to fame, but can only fall to infamy.

Never refuse a small bone because you think there may be a bigger one at hand.

Never regret a lost bone—there is always another to be found, often a bigger one.

So long as you profit by your experience in the past to get you through the difficulties of the present, you may leave the future to look after itself.

Show me a dog's friends, and I will tell you who are his enemies.

Strike quick and hard, for a fight prolonged is a fight half lost.

Only if you are known to be prepared to fight can you expect to live at peace with your neighbours.

Don't bury bones under the chicken house, where rats break in and steal the eggs.

If you earn a thrashing take it like a hero, only don't commit yourself to an unblemished future.

The sweets of indulgence are obvious, but the reward of virtue cannot be estimated.

## CHAPTER IX

### DARKNESS

It came upon me gradually. At first I was puzzled—tree stumps seemed farther off than they really were, ditches had me in their mud before I really knew where I was; still, I fought against it, and determined to go my way as I always have done. But I am rarely taken out for walks or allowed on the road now; one man wearing a leather coat and great goggles, indeed, after a scene and some strong language, declared that I was a positive danger to motor cars. What hurt most was that Master, when he was at home, used to go out—and Father too—without taking

me, but one day I slipped off—even in darkness you cannot forget the gates and palings and paths you have known so well. I knew directly I picked up his scent where he was going to, so I set off by the short cut through the marshy ground, knowing I should soon be up with him.

For a time I got along all right, and then a tree hit me full in the face. I got up, and after shaking myself went on again, but I could not find the track I used to follow. The fact is, I had not been here for six months or more, and the smells were strange to me. Then I half stumbled, half fell into a drain that leads to the stream by the gorse bushes, but scrambled out and followed the bank. That gave me my line. If I kept on straight now I should still cut him off,

only I must hurry on at all costs. Somehow the ground was falling instead of rising. I turned round—which I never should have done—then pressed on again. It was strange I could not find the sandy road, and yet it must have been thereabouts—I gave a short bark of annoyance—it was all darkness and very silent.

I had noticed that too, of late,—the silence. For some time past I have wondered at it—if people wanted me to hear they used to come close up to me. When the cats wandered by I could smell them, only they were silent—chickens too—it was a strange change.

'Lost,' I said to myself, 'lost within half a mile of home,' then I laughed and pressed on. But I was getting tired—

it would be good to have a rest soon—a little farther on—well, perhaps here, I did feel strangely weary and disappointed. No, I would not give in—only just a short sleep, and I should be fit again. Then suddenly I scented Father, and he came up and took me in his arms and talked in my ear and told me he had been standing on the hill and looking down when he saw the old rascal in the valley, following him; and he carried me home. Of course I should have been all right really—I should just have turned and walked home if I had not found him as I did; as it was, well, I was, I will confess, tired, and not sorry to be carried.

You know it is rather odd not to see or hear—as I sit in front of the fire I am conscious of rather less darkness—

that is all—still I have my sense of smell. I was in my basket in the kitchen one day when a girl came with a note, and a poodle quietly walked in. Of course I scented it and went for it—there was an awful smash of cups and saucers, but I got the poodle by the throat; the scrap did not last long though I was very tired after it.

They said little to hurt my feelings. I must own they were very thoughtful, and treated me just as if nothing were the matter; but their pats and strokings betrayed them, and I usually found the garden gate shut now. Often, too, I would be chained to a garden seat, or taken for walks on a lead, and this robbed walks of most of their charm; but I will say the dogs we met behaved like gentlemen—you see they all looked

up to me, for they had been told by their parents all about me, and no doubt wished to resemble me themselves. It is wonderful what example can do.

Winter followed autumn, and, but for a stroll every day, I used to sleep in my basket for the most part, or sit in front of the fire. I liked doing that—with a bright fire I got, as I have said, a sense of less darkness—or rather a darkness varying in intensity—a fire, too, the warmth from it, is very companionable. Long hours have I sat and lived again in the past, hunting old hunts, fighting my fights over again, and thinking about many entertaining things, for my mind is active as ever. Often, too, I thought of Master, and hoped he kept in mind all I had taught him. Some officers, I hear, have their dogs with

them at the war—I wish I had thought of that—it's too late now—I should be in the way — yes — in the way — I, Thompson, a worthless, blind, deaf, useless old—— but I did teach him all I knew—well, cheer up old, yes 'old' Thompson—it must be almost tea-time. Happily, meal times come round very regularly.

Old age has its compensations however—a dignified old age, at least, like mine; and if my active pleasures are of the past, it is the past that makes up the life of me now.

It is a great thing to have had a good time in one's youth—it gives you experience and it gives you memories—you need never be dull if you have a happy past to look back upon.

I knew a man once who, whenever

he had had a good day's hunting or anything of that sort which he had very much enjoyed, used to say, 'Well—that day is in the Bank—nobody can rob me of it now.' I must say the past is still full of delights for me—I never tire of it, and it is a curious thing, too, that it is always the pleasant things of the past which dwell with one—the night out hunting I never forget—I can conjure back every detail of it—the thrashing which may have followed is now an almost forgotten incident.

So the past winter has dragged along to its end at last.

You who are getting old, do you remember springtime when you were past middle age? How, suddenly, there comes a happiness into your thoughts and a new hopefulness, with visions of

hunts and of sleeping out under the bracken; how after spring rain the scents are sweet and fresh, and the rabbits venture afield. Well—one day I felt strangely different—I felt elated, I walked on springs, rheumatism, which had troubled me in the winter, seemed to have vanished for good. It was a Sunday, I know, because breakfast was so late. I stood and sniffed the air, and then wandered round by the kitchen to smell if by chance there was a bone lying about—then a few steps farther to the gate—what was that?—yes, the gate was there, but—why! it was open and I was through it. What luck!—I knew the way—I would not go far, oh no, not any distance, but I should like to follow the path again just to the point where it enters the wood. I crossed the

stream by the bridge, and then just wandered about, sniffing and taking in the fresh life of that spring morning. I felt the warm sun on my back. It was good to be out there again. Then on the breeze came something that took me back to my earliest days—the scent of rabbits in the grass beyond the big bank. Into the field I went, no need for direction now with such a scent, though trees kept getting in my way. I stood still, kept silent, and then ran on—and suddenly found myself half way down a rabbit-hole. 'Too late in the day,' I said to myself. Then I turned back and found the stream; I walked along for a time—it had got very warm then, and I lay down and slept. It was chilly when I woke, and I was hungry, so I started again. I knew I

must be close to home and I hurried along.

But now I had lost the stream and struck a track leading up hill—blind people and those lost in the dark always go up hill—and I was very cold. I think night had come on—I was tired now and very hungry. . . .

I woke with my limbs so stiff that I could hardly move them. Then I managed to stumble on—I followed an odd scent or two, but could not keep them—my head, too, was heavy. But where were my people? Why was I left like this? I barked, but my throat was very dry—some water in a cart rut refreshed me. I must have slept a good deal, then the great cold came on again, and a bitter wind and sleet. I got a little shelter behind a tree—I

barked once or twice. 'What could they be doing? I had never in my life been left like this! Oh, why did nobody come for me?—where was I?' The tangled grass and heather almost held me—I felt very weak. Was it day now? Yes, it must be for the grass was no longer covered with hoar-frost. Why did nobody come out and find me? It was soon night again, for the cold was intense. I curled up under some heather—my eyes burned into my head—I ached with hunger and thirst. 'Stick it out, Thompson,' I said to myself, and with an effort crawled out of the heather into the open; but I was very tired—I must have slept again. When I woke my head no longer ached and my limbs were pleasantly relaxed—I felt no longer hungry—the damp grass

cooled my hot nose. It was almost good to be here and feel nothing—just to lie still—to doze quietly—undisturbed—till——

'All right, dear old Thompson, keep quite quiet, swallow a little more of this good soup—that's better.'

I felt the warm food trickle down my throat, and the fire of something that was in it.

'Dear old Thompson—fancy, you left us on Sunday, we hunted for you everywhere, and it's Wednesday to-day.'

Wednesday!—was it really?—anyhow, I was home at last.

[Thompson rallied on Thursday, but was very weak on Friday and passed away that night in his 18th year. He lies, where he loved on summer days to sleep, under the rhododendrons.]

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